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ABSTRACT

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities and exercises that use folders of interesting material that students can use alone or in small groups are described. The folders contain pictures or other material of interest to the students, instructions in English and Spanish, and answers. The folders are color-coded by type of activity. Reading exercises include texts with prequestions, multiple choice exercises, true-false statements, guessing games, scrambled sentences and paragraphs, and matching activities. Listening activities, generally done by pairs of students, involve one student reading a story to another, who in turn arranges a series of related pictures according to the story content. A writing activity has the student fill in the blanks in sentences related to pictures in the folder. Speaking activities, also done by pairs of students, may include describing and drawing or arranging pictures, finding differences and similarities, memorizing and describing, and locating mistakes in pictures. Puzzles and jokes adapted from commonly available books, and board games also generally available, are also recommended. (MSE)

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THE SELF ACCESS BOX FOR CLASSROOM USE

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The idea of a self-access box sprang from the impossibility of having a self-access center at hand and follows the same design principle. The main objective of both the center and the box is to enable students to use English in a more natural way. The box provides material which encourages students to communicate in order to get what they need or want so as to accomplish a task, complete tables or charts, order pictures, etc. The box has proved to be very successful because, although the number of activities is limited and some listening exercises require a tape, tape recorder and earphones which are sometimes not available or difficult to take to class or be manipulated by the students, the box is portable and can be taken into class any time. This reduces the problem of taking a whole class to the self-access center which may be far from the classroom and therefore involve loss of valuable teaching time, or discipline problems on the way there or back.

Another advantage of the box is that the teacher can control the handling of material which otherwise gets damaged very quickly.

The material consists of folders which have the exercises either printed in them or in envelopes attached to the folders. Pictures and copies of texts are stuck in the folders and then covered with transparent sheets or, if possible, they are laminated. The listening activities requiring a tape recorder can be substituted by listening games done in pairs or groups. In this way the activity becomes more communicative and more students participate, but they may turn to Spanish if they do not understand what their partner is saying. This is a risk that has to be run.

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The box contains mainly fun material which should be relevant

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for the age group involved, taking into account their likes and interests. Therefore, if the box is used in children's or adolescents' classes, the topics should be carefully selected for them: from topics on animals, adventures, pop singers to spooky characters and stories. If used for adult classes then the topics and sources can be more varied.

The material is divided into five or six different main activities: reading, listening, writing and speaking exercises, plus games and puzzles. There are two other possible subdivisions: vocabulary games and jokes. Each of these divisions has a special color to identify the activity and to enable students to choose more easily.

When the teacher takes the box into class for the first time, instructions for its use should be clearly given and checked. Then the students are left on their own to choose what they like, work the exercise out, take it back and,if there is time, choose another activity. Some activities are done individually, some others have to be done in pairs, and the board games involve more than two students. The teacher's role is to monitor and help where necessary. Because the number of exercises is limited by space available, the box should not be used too often with the same class unless the old exercises can be rapidly substituted by new ones so that there is always an element of challenge and surprise. Also, the presentation of the exercises should be attractive and colorful with nice magazine pictures rather than bad photocopies or black and white blurred pictures. Old English school books are also good for collecting picture stories. It is always a good idea to collect any attractive cutouts. One never knows when a bright idea may come up.

The Activities

The reading exercises include texts with pre-questions, multiple choice exercises or true and false statements. Other reading exercises may consist in "Jig-saw paragraphs," "scrambled sentences," "Guess who said it," "Read and match," "How many grammar mistakes can you find?" etc. These exercises are generally done individually. A very popular exercise and one very easy to adapt is the one of the "Text." Any text on an interesting subject will do, so

long as it is presented attractively. When the student opens the folder he finds on one side colorful pictures of elephants and how they're trained. The instructions of what the student has to do should come very clearly in English and in Spanish. The student feels compelled to read as he sees the pictures and reads the instructions. This particular text has some pre-questions which will help him skim the passage to find the answers. When he has done this, how does he know if he is right or wrong? The correct answers come in an envelope attached to the back of the folder. The idea of putting the answers in an envelope is really to prevent students from looking at them before they do the exercise. Another reading activity which is a lot of fun for the students is "Read and Match." The student finds two envelopes in the folder as he opens it: one with a set of pictures of animals, of people or of places, and the other envelope with a set of descriptions. What the student has to do is to read the description and see which picture matches it. The descriptions have numbers and the pictures have letters. Therefore, his answers should be like this: "Picture E matches description 2." After he has done this, he checks his answers at the back.

Listening activities imply reading as well, and are generally done in pairs. For example, the students take one of the listening activities and as they open the folder they find two envelopes. The instructions for their use are on each envelope, both in English and in Spanish. The envelope attached to the left side of the folder is for Student A and contains a card with a story (the degree of difficulty will depend on the level of English of the students). The other side of the folder has another envelope attached and is for Student B. It contains a series of pictures with numbers or letters which can be cut out from any old school book or magazine with a picture story. The students should not show each other the contents of their envelopes. Student A then reads the story and Student B puts the pictures in order. Again, they check if Student B is right or wrong by looking at the answers provided at the back of the folder.

Writing activities can be designed very much in the same way as the other activities, but the answers to these exercises will have to be written in either the students' notebooks or on printed exercises

provided. A simple writing activity can be designed in the following way: on one side of the folder the student finds numbered pictures of different objects or of people performing different actions; on the other side he finds sentences with blank spaces to be filled in with the name of the object the number of the sentences corresponds to in the first case, or with the correct verb (action) in the second case. When the student finishes the exercise he can check his answers.

Speaking activities are a lot of fun. They are very much like communication games where the student has to give a message to another student to accomplish a task. Therefore, these exercises are done in pairs. "Describe and Draw" is a speaking activity which students always like doing. Student A has a folder which contains a picture (the more advanced the level of English of the students the more complicated the picture can be). Student A should not show his picture to Student B who in turn takes out a pencil and a piece of paper. Student A then describes his picture while Student B draws the picture. This generates unpredictable but communicative language between the students, one describing and the other asking if he is right or wrong. When Student A finishes with his description, he allows Student B to look at the picture and compare it with his own drawing. Other activities are "Describe and Arrange," "Find the differences or similarities," "Memorize and describe," and "Find how many mistakes the picture has."

The puzzles and the jokes are often for individual work and can be adapted from any language puzzle book or magazine. It is advisable to provide the relevant information very clearly and the instructions before the student starts working on the activity.

The board games can be played by two or more students. Any board game can be used or adapted, but there are printed language board games which can be used as such or adapted to the level of English required. The rules of the game have to be illustrated clearly in English with the Spanish version following. Some of these games may involve following orders, vocabulary building, association, buying and selling, numbers and negotiating. The games are the most popular activities among children and juniors, but adults like them as well!